

more than a dozen nations under the Proliferation Security Initiative to interdict lethal materials transported by land, sea, or air. And we have shown our willingness to use force when force is required. No one can now doubt the determination of America to oppose and to end these threats to our security.

We are aggressively pursuing another dangerous source of proliferation, black-market operatives who sell equipment and expertise related to weapons of mass destruction. The world recently learned of the network led by A.Q. Khan, the former head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. Khan and his associates sold nuclear technology and know-how to rogue regimes around the world, such as Iran and North Korea. Thanks to the tireless work of intelligence officers from the United States and the United Kingdom and other nations, the Khan network is being dismantled.

This week, I proposed a series of new, ambitious steps to build on our recent success against proliferation. We must expand the international cooperation of law enforcement organizations to act against proliferation networks, to shut down their labs, to seize their materials, to freeze their assets, and to bring their members to justice.

We must strengthen laws and international controls that fight proliferation. Last fall at the United Nations, I proposed a new Security Council resolution requiring all states to criminalize proliferation, enact strict export controls, and secure all sensitive materials within their borders. I urge the Council to pass these measures quickly.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, one of the most important tools for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, is undermined by a loophole that allows countries to seek nuclear weapons under the cover of civilian nuclear power programs. I propose that the world's leading nuclear exporters close that loophole. The Nuclear Suppliers Group should refuse to sell enrichment and reprocessing equipment and technologies to any state that does not already possess full scale, functioning enrichment and reprocessing plants.

For international rules and laws to be effective, they must be enforced. We must ensure that the International Atomic Energy

Agency is fully capable of exposing and reporting banned nuclear activity. Every nation should sign what is called the Additional Protocol, which would allow the IAEA to make broader inspections of nuclear sites. We should also establish a special IAEA committee to focus on safeguards and verification. And no nation under investigation for proliferation violations should be able to serve on this committee or on the governing board of the IAEA. Governments breaking the rules should not be trusted with enforcing the rules.

Terrorists and terrorist states are in a race for weapons of mass murder, a race they must lose. They are resourceful. We must be more resourceful. They are determined. We must be more determined. We will never lose focus or resolve. We will be unrelenting in the defense of free nations and rise to the hard demands of our dangerous time.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10:55 a.m. on February 13 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 14. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 13 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in a Discussion on the National Economy in Tampa, Florida

February 16, 2004

Ms. Connie Horner. Welcome, President Bush and the First Lady. It is a tremendous honor for all of us to be here with you on President's Day.

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Horner. We're all wondering how you enjoyed the race yesterday?

The President. A lot. [Laughter] I had the honor of calling Dale Earnhardt, Jr., after the race, to congratulate him. I said, "There's nothing wrong with a fellow following in his father's footsteps." [Laughter] We had a great time, really a good time.

And it's such an honor to be here in Tampa. It's a beautiful part of our country. Thanks for having me.

[At this point, Connie Horner, president, NuAir Manufacturing, made brief remarks.]

The President. You're probably wondering why we're here. It's because we're going to herald the entrepreneurial spirit of America and talk about small-business ownership and job creation. And we're going to talk to some people who are working hard to do their duty as a parent, what it means to try to make a living in this environment.

Our country has been through a lot recently. We really have, I know. I want to remind people that—during the course of this conversation—there's nothing we can't overcome as a nation, because of the people.

So we're going to—we'll have a discussion here about the economy. But before we do, obviously you saw that Laura is here, and I'm really, really pleased she's traveling with me.

I want to thank the Horners for having us here. Mr. Horner, thank you very much for your hospitality, and Ms. Horner.

I also want to thank members of the congressional delegation who have come to say hello and to listen. I appreciate their friendship. Congressman Mike Bilirakis, Congressman Adam Putnam—good to see Adam—Ginny Brown-Waite, Congresswoman Waite, good to see you. Congresswoman Katherine Harris is with us. Thank you all. I appreciate you all being here.

I know the Lieutenant Governor is here, Toni Jennings. By the way, you might tell the Governor I was looking for him. [Laughter] He's—

Audience member. He's working.

The President. Yes, I know he's working. He's in Costa Rica. [Laughter] He is—I'm really proud of that man. He is a fabulous brother and a great Governor. Give him my best. The attorney general is with us. General, good to see you, Charlie Crist.

I know we've got some mayors here, the mayor of St. Pete, the mayor of Seminole, and the mayor of Clearwater. Thank you all for coming. I'm honored you're here. My only advice is, fill the potholes—[laughter]—a lot of citizens and local officials.

Last night when I arrived from Daytona Beach, I met a fellow named Candy Corona. I don't know if Candy is here. He thought he might be able to get here. There he is.

Candy, good to see you. Thank you for coming. So you're wondering why I would introduce Candy. I'll tell you why, because the strength of this country is not our military, even though we will keep it strong. The strength of this country isn't the fact that we've got wealth—and the good news is we're generating more for our people. The strength of this country is the fact we've got people who are willing to volunteer to serve a neighbor in need. That's the strength. The strength of the country is the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens. That's the true strength of America.

Candy is a volunteer. He takes time out of his life to paint houses for senior citizens. That means a lot to the senior citizen who he is helping. You see, ours is a country where citizens—not because of government, by the way—decide to help somebody in need, and they change America one heart and one soul at a time.

And the reason Candy is here—I've asked him to come—is so we can herald that great aspect of the country. People want to serve our Nation. You can do so in a lot of ways. You can mentor a child. You can feed the hungry. You can help the housing of those who can't help themselves. There are all kinds of ways you can serve America, by loving your neighbor just like you would like to be loved yourself. Candy, thank you for the example you set, and we're proud you're here. Thank you.

We have a lot of reasons to be optimistic in America. I want to remind you what this country has been through right quick. First of all, in the year 2000, the economy began to slow down, and a recession came our way in early 2001. Now, when you have a recession, it means the economy is going backwards and people can't find work. You might remember the times of uncertainty during a recession—you know, you're wondering whether or not there's another window to make, or you're wondering whether or not there's another product to sell. And when you're having trouble selling product, the labor market becomes soft and negative. People can't do their jobs, which is to put food on the table for their families. And so the recession really affected us.

And we started to come out of the recession, and then the enemy hit us. And that hurt. It hurt a lot. It hurt our economy, of course, but it also hurt our national psychology, because we thought oceans could protect us from harm. It caused me to look at the world in different ways. It meant I couldn't look at a threat and hope it would go away and, when I saw a threat, that we couldn't take the good will of madmen and dictators, that my most solemn duty is to protect the American people. So when we saw gathering threats, we had to deal with them. That's what September the 11th said. And we did deal with them. And the world is safer, and America is more secure as a result of dealing with threats.

And then it turned out some of our citizens forgot to tell the truth. Corporate CEOs didn't tell the truth to their shareholders and their investors, and that affected the psychology of the country. We had a recession, and then we were attacked by a hateful enemy. And then some of our own citizens let us down, didn't they? And people began to wonder about the capitalist system; how could they trust the word of corporate America if CEOs weren't willing to tell the truth.

We passed laws, by the way, to hold them to account. And if you notice, slowly but surely, justice is being delivered. I mean, the message is clear: If you lie, cheat, or steal, there will be a consequence here in America.

Then, as I mentioned, I made the tough decision to go to war. Laura reminded me that early in the summer of 2002 on our TV screens it started to say, "March to War," a prediction of war. It's not a good environment to invest capital when you see on your TV screens "March to War." It's hard to be optimistic about the future when you think you're marching to war. Now we're marching to peace. Now the world is more peaceful.

But we've overcome a lot, when you think about what this country has been through. Those were a lot of obstacles and hurdles for this Nation to handle. And yet, our economy is strong. I will argue vociferously that one of the reasons it's strong is because the Congress wisely heeded my call and let people keep more of their own money. You see, when people have more money in their pocket, they're more likely to demand a good or

a service. And in our economy, when somebody demands an additional good or a service, somebody is likely to produce it. And when somebody produces a good or a service, somebody is more likely to find work.

The tax relief was a vital part of this economic recovery. I say "recovery," the facts bear me out. The last 6 months of growth have been tremendous. Housing starts are way up. Inflation is low. Interest is low. New jobs are being created. Reports for manufacturing activity is up. Things are looking better for America.

We increased the child credit to help people raise their families, and we'll talk about that here in a little bit. We reduced the effects of what they call a marriage penalty. I can't imagine a Tax Code that penalizes marriage. It seems like we want a society that encourages marriage, not penalizes marriage.

We helped our senior citizens with relief on dividends and capital gains. But one of the vital aspects of the tax relief plan was the help it provided to small business. You see, most small businesses pay tax at the individual income tax level. A lot of Americans don't understand that, but it's true. A lot of small businesses are sole proprietorships. When you're a sole proprietorship, it means you pay tax at the individual income tax level. A lot of small business are what they call Subchapter S corporations, which means that they pay tax at the individual income tax level.

So I went to Congress and said, "Let's reduce all taxes on people who pay tax." I mean, if you pay tax, you ought to get tax relief. We ought not to try to pick and choose who the winners and losers are when it comes to tax relief. Part of that is just out of simple fairness, and part of it is because I understand the importance of small businesses. See, if you're worried about people working and you realize most new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes sense to have policies that encourage small businesses to grow.

So the tax relief plan you hear some people maligning around our country helps small-business growth. It put money in the coffers of small businesses. It helped invigorate the entrepreneurial spirit here in America, which is important. Plus we had additional tax relief

to encourage investment, and you'll hear some talk about that today. No, the tax relief came at the right time. It is making an enormous difference.

And now what the United States Congress must do is to make the tax relief permanent. The tax relief is set to expire. It was good policy, but it's going to expire. The child credit goes down next year, unless Congress acts. The penalty on marriage goes up, unless Congress acts. A family of four—a married couple with two children making \$40,000 a year will see a \$915 tax increase, unless Congress acts. You hear people in Washington saying, "Oh, let's not make the tax cuts permanent." When you hear somebody say that, they're saying, "We're going to tax you. We're going to raise your taxes." You'll hear some discussion about what that means for a family when their taxes go up, but from an economic perspective, I'm telling you, now is not the time to raise the taxes on the American people.

There's some other things we need to do here in this country. We need to make sure that other people open their markets to U.S. products. Our markets are open to other countries. Let's open theirs. We're good at things. Just give our people a chance to sell them overseas, and we'll compete.

We've got to make sure we've got energy here in this country. We need to make sure we've got reliable electricity. Congress needs to get me an energy bill this year. We need to make sure that—these small-business owners will tell you, too much paperwork can stifle innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit. The Federal Government, the State Government, Lieutenant Governor, and the local governments must do everything they can to make the paperwork burden less on small businesses, not more. We need less regulation when it comes to overburdening the people who are creating jobs here in America.

Health costs are a real problem here in this country. They're on the rise. I put forth some plans to help deal with the rising cost of health care, such as health savings accounts. These are innovative new approaches. I urge people to contact your health care providers to understand the power of health savings accounts. We've got

association health plans, a plan that stalled in Congress, that allows small business to pool risk. You see, small businesses can't associate now in order to buy insurance like big businesses can, and small businesses ought to be allowed to try to contain costs by pooling risk.

But I tell you one thing we need to do in this country in order to control the cost of rising medical care, we need to get rid of the junk and frivolous lawsuits that are driving good doctors out of business. There's some powerful interests in Washington that don't want to see this happen. But if you talk to small-business owners all across the country, they will tell you, rising health care cost is a problem. And if you talk to doctors and medical care providers, they'll tell you frivolous lawsuits are driving them out of business. If you talk to people about defensive medicine, they'll tell you frivolous lawsuits are driving up the cost to taxpayers.

It's estimated that the Federal Government spends over \$20 billion a year because of the practice of defensive medicine because of frivolous and junk lawsuits. We need to do something about it. The House passed a good bill, but the special interests have got it bottled up in the United States Senate. These Senators, like the two from your State, have got to understand that medical liability reform is good for job creation. It's good for small businesses, and it's good for America, and we need it now.

Anyway, you can understand why I'm optimistic about this country. I've seen what we have overcome. But I'm really optimistic because the thing that really makes America work are the people in this country, the spirit of the American people, the incredible workers we have in this country. Our Nation has got the best workers in the world by far, right here.

And the other thing about America is the great entrepreneurial spirit. It is strong. It is alive. It is well. It is one of the great success stories of our country, in which somebody can come with a good idea and dream big and start their own business. That's what I love about the country. One of the vital roles of Government is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes. That's one of the most important roles of

Government. I believe this administration is doing so. I believe we set the stage for further growth of small businesses, so people can own something. We want people owning something in America. We want you owning your own home. We want you owning and managing your own retirement accounts and health care plans, and if you're so inclined, we want you owning and running your own small business.

Connie Horner has the great opportunity here in America to run her own business. She's a CEO of a thriving, vibrant business. And if you've got a business inclination, there's nothing more exciting than running your own small business. And I can just tell she feels that way when I first met her. She's enthusiastic. One of the things she told me right off the bat is, "We're successful because we've got a great workforce here, people who care about what they're doing." So Connie, thank you for having me. Why don't you share with the people your story, tell them about your plans this year. If you're thinking about adding a job, you might mention that. If you're not, that's okay; you can mention that too. [*Laughter*]

[*Ms. Horner made further remarks.*]

The President. There's a couple of things she said. She said the Tax Code encouraged her to make an investment. Well, when she invests in a piece of equipment, somebody has to manufacture the equipment. In other words, the Tax Code caused this company to make a decision, an economic decision. In other words, demand increased for a product in this case. Somebody has to make that. There's a ripple effect. Good tax policy creates a ripple effect throughout the economy. So not only does the increased equipment help this company, particularly help the workers become more productive—and by the way, productivity increases for American workers means better pay. That's what that means. It means our workers become the best in the world, which will yield better pay.

Part of the decisionmaking was because we allowed for the expense of certain capital expenditures. And we allowed for accelerated depreciation. It's important for small businesses to have consistent tax laws. In other words, you don't want planners and thinkers

to be saying, "Gosh, the tax law may or may not be the same next year." That creates confusion in the decisionmaking process. We need constancy here, and so I appreciate you bringing that up. I also want you to know, she said, "We may add 40 workers this year." That's really good news for two groups of people. One, the workers here, it means that there's reliable jobs. She wouldn't be adding 40 workers if people's jobs weren't secure who already have them here. But the other good news is for the 40 that could find work here.

But plus, there are thousands of entrepreneurs in America, all over the country, making the same kind of decisions—40 workers here, 5 workers there begin to add up to excitement and new jobs. And that's what we're interested in, and that's what we're talking about, how to create an environment where people are willing to take risk so that somebody can find work.

[*Ms. Horner made further remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Ms. Horner. And we are just incredibly optimistic about our future, and we have you to thank for that.

The President. Actually, you've got yourself to thank for it, see? You've got yourself to thank for it. People—all governments can do is create an environment. It's up to our fellow citizens to seize the opportunity. We can't make you be bold. We can't make you be smart. We can't make you make the right decisions. That's up to you. I mean, the truth of the matter is, this economy is good because of the people in America. But thank you for the credit. Of course, I'll take it any time you give it. [*Laughter*]

Again, I want the people who might be listening in to see the connection between investment and jobs. Connie says that, "We're going to invest a million dollars this year." Investment means purchasing, in this case, equipment. And somebody has got to make the equipment. So when you hear policies that encourage investment, I hope you make the connection between the word "investment" and the creation of jobs. And that's why so much talk with the economists are about—are people investing, because that investment cycle will lead to the increase of

employment. So when you hear Connie say, "We're thinking about investing a million dollars," that's positive news for somebody who is wondering whether or not they can find a job.

Now, speaking about investing—good job, by the way. Sam Leto is with us. Sam is the chairman of Tampa Brass & Aluminum Corporation. He's about to tell you what that company does. I'm about to tell you, however, that Sam's company is organized as a Subchapter S corporation, which means that when you reduce taxes on the individual taxpayer, you're really reducing taxes on his business. And one of the fundamental questions that you must ask during an economic slowdown is, "Who do you want spending the people's money?" I obviously made the decision that I think it's best that the small-business owners spend money on their employees and on making sure their companies are modern and in good shape. I'd rather—in an economic recession, I'd rather that, in order to get out of this recession, that the people be spending their money, not the Government trying to figure out how to spend the people's money.

And so Sam is a person who—Sam has got him a small business. Sam, tell us about it.

[Sam Leto, chairman of the board, Tampa Brass & Aluminum Corp., made brief remarks.]

The President. Yes, one thing—I'm going to interrupt you for a quick second, Sam—another piece of bad legislation that I think we corrected, at least corrected temporarily—it's going to come back unless Congress acts—is to get rid of the death tax. Let me tell you what the death tax does.

Here's a fellow who has worked hard to build his business up, and he has made the decision to, obviously, to leave it to your family, unless, of course, they misbehave, in which case he may change his mind. [Laughter] The Government is now taxing his company's earnings. When he goes on and leaves his business to his sons and daughter, they'll tax it again. That doesn't make any sense, does it, to get taxed twice. It's not good for farmers to have the death tax. It's not good for the ranchers of America. It's not good for the small-business owners. Congress got

rid of the death tax, except it comes back to life in 2011. We need to get rid of it forever for the sake of entrepreneurs.

[Mr. Leto made further remarks, concluding as follows.]

Mr. Leto. Mr. President, we have to keep this tax cut.

The President. Thank you, sir. I agree. Good job, Sam. Sam's feeling pretty upbeat about life, it sounds like to me. That's good. You see, a lot of the—a lot of economic growth depends upon the psychology of the people making decisions all throughout our economy, whether it be the consumers wanting to buy more or whether it be employers willing to invest more. And so far the entrepreneurs have been upbeat. And it's—but you're going to say, "Well, of course, they just pick the upbeat people." Well, the truth of the matter is, people are pretty upbeat all over the country. That's what I'm here to report to you. There's an optimism in our country that is undeniable. And we've got growth. And the key question is are we wise enough to continue the policies but to keep the policies in place that encourage growth.

We've got with us Kevin Govin. He's the COO of MarkMaster, Inc. Tell us what MarkMaster, Inc., does.

[Kevin Govin, chief operating officer, MarkMaster, Inc., made brief remarks.]

The President. Kevin, thanks. I want to pick up on two things he said. Both of them have to do with education. He said his son goes to a community college. It's essential that State Governments take advantage of the community college system here to make sure people are trained for the jobs which will exist as we head into the 21st century.

Technology races through our economies, as you know. Oftentimes the labor market is lagging behind in the change necessary to make sure the workers have got the skills necessary. I strongly believe the community college system is a place to make sure workers gain the skills necessary to be able to hold the jobs of the future. I think it's very—I appreciate you mentioning community college systems. There's a lot of fantastic community college systems here in Florida and around the country. I've asked Congress to

put money forth for grantmaking to community colleges so we can train people.

We've got a lot of good people. But as the economy changes, as these new machines come into be, people need to learn how to use them. As the health care industry changes, people need to be able to know what it means to be a nurse in the modern era. And so we've got to train people and train them well.

I also know that one of the great things about our country and having a vibrant small-business sector is that oftentimes some of the best and hopeful programs are instigated by CEOs, programs to help workers embetter themselves, education programs, training programs. People have got to understand here in this country that there are a lot of people who look to America and say, "Gosh, I want to be able to provide for my family here."

And therefore we need a work system that is—promotes legal activity, not illegal activity. A work system that says if you can't—if an employer can't find an American worker, and yet there's somebody else willing to do the job, there ought to be a card, a worker card—not a citizenship card but a card to allow people to work, so that we can recognize what is taking place illegally here, an underground economy. That's not the American way. The American way is rule of law. The American way is understanding people come here to put food on the table for their children. And again, I repeat to you, I don't believe we ought to be promoting blanket amnesty for people who are working here, but I do believe we ought to have an orderly system that allows people to legally apply to work when they can't find an American worker. This will help our homeland security issues, and it will make sure employers can find willing workers, which is an important part of making sure this economy continues to grow.

Speaking about willing workers, I'm sitting next to one, Noemi Gonzalez. She is an accounting clerk here at NuAir Manufacturing. She is excited to be here.

Ms. Gonzalez. Yes, I am.

The President. Would you tell us your story? We spent time talking about small-business growth, the entrepreneurial spirit.

But every small-business owner will tell you, their businesses cannot survive without really good workers, good, hard-working, decent, honorable Americans. We've got two here with us today. A representative sample, I might add. Noemi.

Ms. Gonzalez. Okay, I don't have—I have a big business, my family.

The President. Si.

Ms. Gonzalez. And my three children.

The President. Adonde? Ahi.

Ms. Gonzalez. And my granddaughter. That's my big business.

The President. That is your most important job, by the way. Accounting is important, but not nearly as important as being a mother.

Ms. Gonzalez. And a grandmother.

The President. And a grandmother. Well, you don't look old enough to be a grandmother. [Laughter]

Ms. Gonzalez. I'm really glad to work here at NuAir, thanks to Connie. I've been her employee for 2 years, and I'm really glad of the tax relief, because now I can think ahead, to send my daughter to college.

The President. Yes, she got \$2,400 in tax relief last year.

Ms. Gonzalez. And I know there's a lot of people like me; they're glad to receive the tax relief.

The President. You know, that may not sound a lot to some people in Washington, \$2,400. They throw a lot of numbers around in Washington. That's a lot to her. That's a lot of money to a lot of people. When you got people who are working hard to maintain their family—she's looking after her granddaughter as well—\$2,400 is a lot. It's a lot of money. It's a lot of security. It's a lot of hope, and this Congress must understand that. They understand 2,400. And if we don't make the tax relief permanent, she pays an additional \$1,200 next year. And that's not right. And that's not right. And she said—I'm putting words in your mouth. What are you going to do with money? You said you're going to save? [Laughter]

Ms. Gonzalez. Well, we're planning a vacation to go to Texas.

The President. That's good. Yes. [Laughter]

Ms. Gonzalez. Family vacation. Texas.

The President. Yes. *Que inteligente.*

Ms. Gonzalez. Viva la gente. We're planning a family vacation with my family. We're going to see my nephew. He's coming from Iraq. He has been there for a year.

The President. Oh, fantastic. Where are you going? *Adonde?*

Ms. Gonzalez. San Antonio.

The President. San Antonio?

Ms. Gonzalez. San Antonio, Texas.

The President. You tell your nephew, "On behalf of a grateful Commander in Chief and a grateful country, thank you for your service."

Ms. Gonzalez. Thank you. He's so glad to do it. He's so happy to do it, and we're a really proud family. Thank you very much. Thank you.

The President. Okay, Noemi, thanks. What a fantastic American story, isn't it? You know, the nephew serving for a cause greater than himself, Noemi working hard to support her family. The word you heard was, "I'm going to take some of the tax relief and save it for my child's education." The best education programs start at home. A child's first teacher is a mom or a dad. A mom or dad must understand that education is the gateway to success in this country. We've got to make sure our public schools, by the way, function well. But we've also got to make sure—but personal responsibility, being responsible for your families, also an important part of making sure people get educated here. Good job.

I was looking for you yesterday on the racetrack, Steve. I was—I heard I was coming here to meet you. And I said—well, they said, "He's a race car driver." So I was looking—[laughter]—but I didn't see you.

Mr. Martin. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. The fact that you're willing to get in there and race those kind of cars on those steep banks says a lot about you, though—positive, I might add. [Laughter] But thank you. Tell us about yourself. Thanks for being here today.

[Steve Martin, installation manager, NuAir Manufacturing, made brief remarks.]

The President. I appreciate it. Thank you. I just want to remind everybody that tax—the child credit is going down next year. And

if you listen to some of them talking out of Washington these days, that's fine with them. They're going to repeal—when you hear them say, "Repeal the Bush tax cuts," don't be thinking about Bush. Be thinking about people like Steve and Noemi. That's what you need to be thinking about when you hear that talk. Because when the child credit goes down, it means everybody who has got a child, in essence, pays increased taxes. That doesn't seem to be good policy to me. You've heard the effects of what tax relief means to individual Americans. It means they've got more money to make decisions, whether it's to save or go on a vacation to Texas or to have a quality of life issue at home. These are important issues. These are issues made by individual Americans, with their own money, by the way.

And that's what the tax relief says to me. It says that we've got a proper perspective on who ought to be making decisions with your money. Listen, we've got money in Government. You don't have to worry about that. But the fact that there's more money in your pockets have made this economy strong, and that's where we need to keep it. And it's a fundamental debate going on in this country. It's pretty clear where I stand. I stand squarely with the people in this debate. I want them to have more of their own money.

I hope you've enjoyed this conversation as much as I have. It's a—it is a way for six people to have a conversation about the economy and in an unusual way, isn't it? [Laughter] Yes, well—but there has been some pretty interesting points that have come out of it. One, there's a sense of optimism, at least amongst the employers who are here. The tax relief has made a difference in small-business people's lives. You've heard plans for 5, 6 employees or 60 employees or 20 employees, whatever it may be.

But this is happening all over the country. Small businesses are alive and well. Good policy recognizes that most new jobs in America are created by small-business owners. And therefore, tax policy and fiscal policy and public policy all ought to be aimed at strengthening the small-business sector of America. And then, of course, there's the individual stories about hard-working, decent Americans worried about their families, and

what they do with the more money in their pocket.

And that's what tax relief is all about, and it's important for people in Washington, DC, to hear the voices of the people, to hear what people are saying about this economy. No, I'm optimistic for this country. I've seen what we've been through, and I know the character of the people of this country. There's nothing that we can't overcome in America.

I want to thank you all for coming. May God bless you, and God bless this country.

NOTE: The discussion began at 9:03 a.m. at NuAir Manufacturing. In his remarks, he referred to NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt, Jr.; Gov. Jeb Bush, Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings, and State Attorney General Charlie Crist of Florida; Mayor Richard M. Baker of St. Petersburg, FL; Mayor Dottie K. Reeder of Seminole, FL; and Mayor Brian Aungst, Sr., of Clearwater, FL.

Remarks to Military Personnel at Fort Polk, Louisiana

February 17, 2004

Thank you all. What a week, first NASCAR and today Fort Polk, Louisiana. Thank you for the warm welcome. It is an honor to be here with the soldiers and families of Fort Polk. This post is home to some of the Army's oldest and finest units. All of you are living up to the motto of our 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, "Always ready."

The 2d Cavalry is now deployed in Iraq. So is the mighty Warrior Brigade from Fort Polk. This post has long been vital to the defense of America, and today, the men and women of Fort Polk are serving with skill and bravery in the war on terror. Since our Nation was attacked on September the 11th, 2001, this post has trained and deployed more than 10,000 troops to fight the terrorist enemy. The JRTC Operations Group is providing superb training for America's soldiers. And with people like you in the fight against terror, there is no doubt that the enemy will be defeated and freedom will prevail.

In the war, America depends on our military to meet the dangers abroad and to keep our country safe. The American people appreciate this sacrifice, and our Government owes you more than gratitude. We must al-

ways make sure that America's soldiers are well-equipped and well-trained to fight this war on terror.

Every person in uniform also depends on the faithful support of their family. Military families have faced many hardships in this time of testing, and you have faced them together. Every military installation is a strong and caring community. You look out for each other. You accept the sacrifices of service to America. And I want you to know, our whole Nation is grateful to our military families.

I appreciate General Kamiya for his introduction. When I was walking here from Marine One, somebody told me he just got promoted. Congratulations, General. Les Brownlee, the Acting Secretary of the Army, is with us. General Pete Schoomaker, who is the Army Chief of Staff, is with us today. General, thank you for coming. General Ellis, I appreciate you being here. Colonel Woolfrey, Command Sergeant Major Christian; Command Sergeant Major Savusa is with us, as well. I'm honored that you men are here.

Today I had the privilege of traveling with Senator Mary Landrieu from the State of Louisiana, Congressman David Vitter, and Congressman Rodney Alexander. I want to thank all the State and local officials who are with us today. I appreciate so very much Kevin Sharp and John Berry for taking time out to provide the entertainment for the troops and families today.

I just met Margie Nobles. Margie volunteered more than 1,400 hours helping families of soldiers during their transition to Fort Polk and during times of deployment. People often talk about the strength of America being our military, and it is strong, and I intend to keep it that way. But the real strength of the country lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens, people like Margie who are willing to help somebody who hurts, people who are willing to take time out of their busy lives to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. For those of you who are soldiers in the army of compassion, I want to thank you for your service to your community and to your country.

The Fort Polk community is also home to thousands of veterans and retired military. Our veterans defended our Nation and